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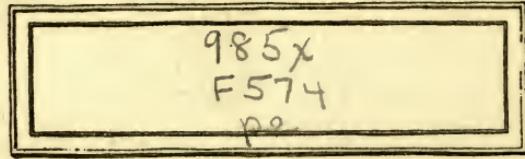
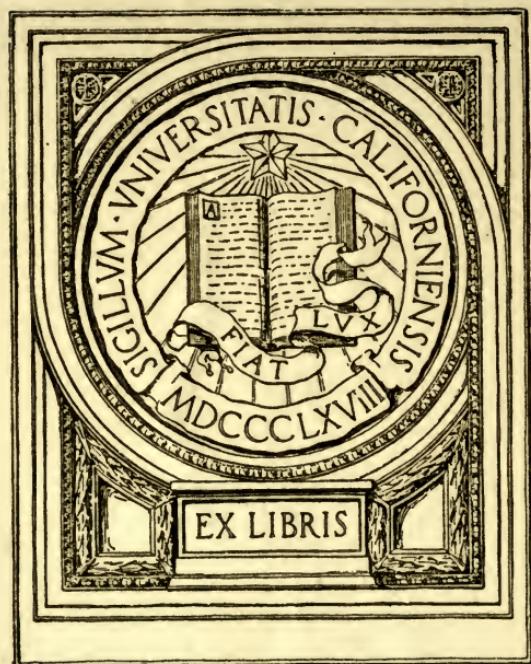


PERSEPHONE

BY

ALICE FLAGG

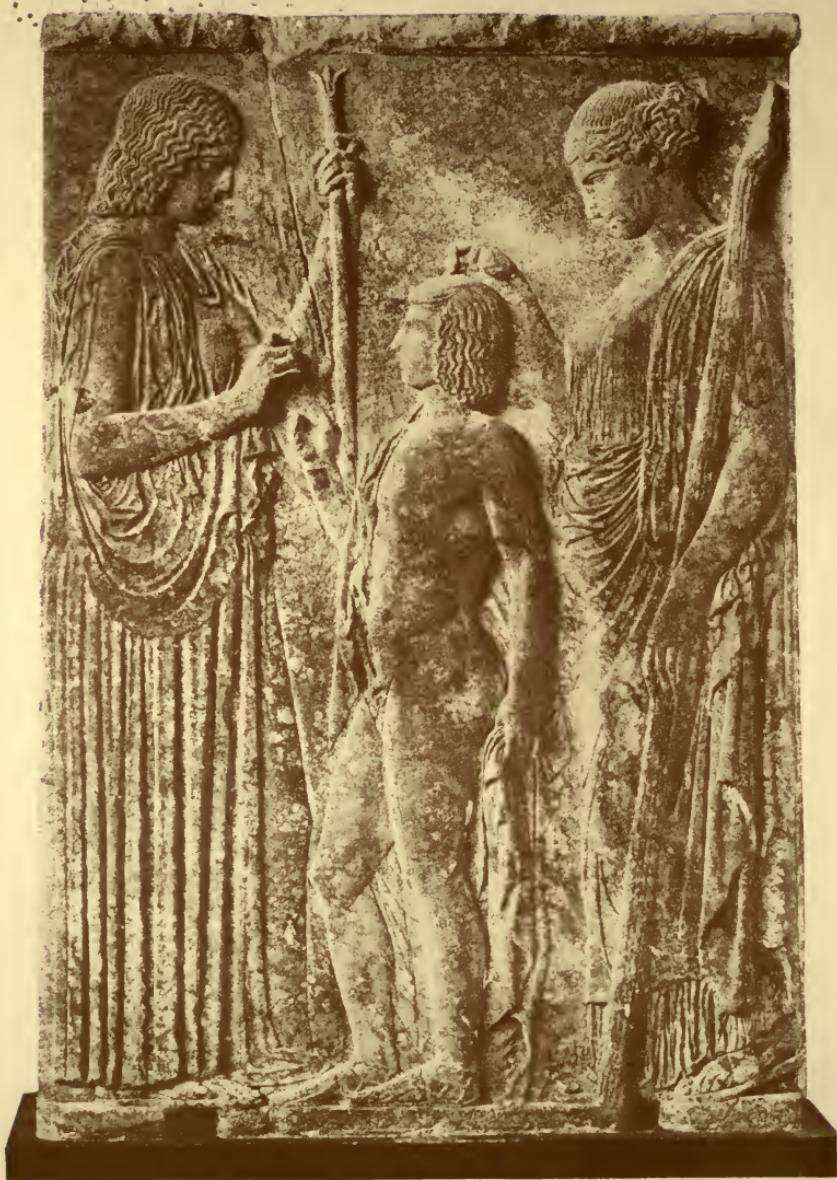
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PERSEPHONE
A Masque
BY ISAAC FLAGG



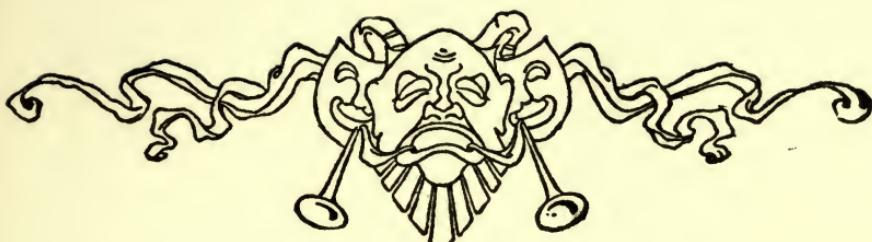
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PERSEPHONE

*A
Masque*

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SCHEME

PROLOGUE

HERMES

I

By the Borders of Ocean

OCEANIDES PERSEPHONE DEMETER

II

By the Grove of the Hamadryads and the Mansion
made Desolate

DEMETER SELENE HAMADRYADS

III

At the Home of Eumolpus in Eleusis

EUMOLPUS COUNCILLORS AN AGED MINSTREL

CALLITHOË DEMO DEMETER

METANEIRA IAMBE SERVANTS

IV

By the Entrance to the Lower World

HERMES PLUTO PERSEPHONE

V

By the House of Eumolpus

CHILDREN IAMBE METANEIRA CALLITHOË

DEMO EUMOLPUS COUNCILLORS

DEMETER IRIS

EPILOGUE

In the Temple at Éleusis .



PERSEPHONE



PROLOGUE

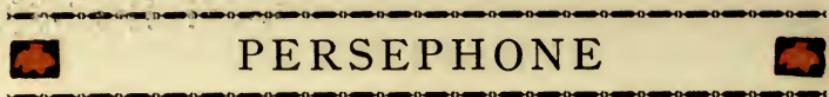
By the Borders of Ocean

HERMES

Between the bounds

Of light and darkness my commission is
To mediate, when from the vaulted heaven
Some swift decisive errand by my hand
The Father warrants for these nether worlds,
Be his solicitude for brief transient lives
Or the soul's final destiny in store.

He wills, he nods. Then, as a falling star
That scars the welkin with a chain of fire
And mortals say, Behold ! there speaks a sign,
So to terrestrial regions I dart down,
As now. Or, sometime, to that lower realm,
A ghostly monarch's yet unfear'd domain.
It is a token touching both him and those
Who own his sway not yet, that I this hour
Bring from imperial heaven.—Nor need they see
Nor listen, when thus some mandate I proclaim
To the frail mortal dwellers of this sphere.
Let but the fixt omnipotent will ordain,
Then shall it surely find each human soul.



PERSEPHONE

Unheard, yet shall it thrill them ; and their hearts
Shall learn, not comprehending. 'T is as if,
Planting intelligence with painless sting,
The winged lightning spread the tidings wide
In infinite direction.

O, thrice blest !

If men but knew the bliss that wraps them now ;
Moved they not all-unconscious through the years,
As children hold no measure to compare
And estimate their gladness. Even no name
Find these for their own era of the world,
Which with admiring envious regret
Less happy cycles will look back upon
And voice their praises of the Age of Gold.
When every hour is golden, by what touch
Of disillusion ; by what cunning mark
Shall its transcendent quality be made known
To the untroubled spirit?—A long dream
More soft than slumber, brighter than the dawn
That wakes on fresh dews of the starry night,
In the unsullied day's fulfilment merged.
Not yet those designations fit the tongue
Which through succeeding ages shall be rife,
Envy, injustice, wrath and war. Not yet



PROLOGUE



Are laws and punishments. No boundary stone
Severs the fields. No bark defies the deep.
They buy and sell not, seek no foreign shore.
Not yet the ploughman's labor : earth unvext,
Untill'd, unaided yields its increase. Full
Flow its pellucid fountains ; while the vine
Trailing luxuriant, purple-laden, lends
A nectar'd moiety.—Existence thus
Begun, the end is easy. Life's supreme
Crown of beatitude, euthanasy,
Awaits their welcome : burthenless old age,
Mellow'd and unrepining, fades in sleep.
Nor deem the rest, that these though lost are gone.
Not lost, though absent ; present, though unseen :
Benign superior spirits hovering still
In the same spotless world.

Alas !

Of aeons, as of lives, there comes an end.
Time and the message I voice now, confirm
The fateful word, this Golden Age must pass ;
By its successor dispossess'd, as when
The sombre leaflet triumphs o'er the green.
This day their sun to his last setting sinks,
To greet no other unregretful morn,



PERSEPHONE



No other scatheless passage through the hours.
No more from toil and megrim free, content
To bide the morrow, of its blessing sure,
Shall each receive unsought his portion due
Of nature's bounty ; nor unenvied hold
That which his labor wins. Sorrow and joy
In jalousied admixture fain to quaff
From the same cup, such potion they will deem
Tolerable, be not the bitter share
Pour'd in excess. Strange phantoms of disease,
Ill-boding choir, will chant a shrill refrain,
With ceaseless menace, at the doors of all
Doom'd to be born hereafter. Now no more
Shall painless dissolution smooth the seam
Marking pale memory's hardly sunder'd tie ;
But in their prime, or youth, or infancy
One from another rudely snatch'd, full oft,
As the frail sapling by fierce whirlwind snapt,
Shall loved ones out of loving arms be torn ;
While vainly into the darksome gulf, that yawns
Beyond the funeral-pile, each frantic cry
Of prayerful lamentation shall be flung,—
To him, the pitiless, the inexorable.
Saddest of litanies—nor like to those
Which, not unanswer'd, unto *us* betimes



PROLOGUE



With mourning shall ascend.

It was a need
Of mediation 'twixt the visible world
And shadow'd mystery—a concession due
To powers that shall unheeded dwell no more,
Moved the supernal ruler to decree
The passing of an unconscious happy age
Into the troublous phase of care and strife,
Wonder and doubt and strange bewilderment,
With glimmering hopes suffused ; to guide the soul
By thoughtful stages of inquietude
Along the mortal journey to its bourn.
Wayfaring nobler than, rapt, with no gauge,
No touchstone of comparison, so to live
As if they lived not. Now shall men be led
To seek and never find ; to crave, to yearn
Without possessing ; to question, but not know.
Nor can attainment or dull respite follow,
To pall the spirit with complacent pride.

Here, where the sleepless stream
Of coiling Ocean, in broad cincture clasp'd
About the medial earth, murmurs response
To light airs by its margent stealing ; mirrors



PERSEPHONE



Each fleecy cloud ; and laps this shelving strand
Starr'd with gay blossoms of eternal spring ;—
Here, nigh to yonder cliff, whereby even now
Perchance grim terror lurks :—hither will point
Back solemnly through immemorial years
Tradition's finger, while ten-thousand tones
Of rapt, inspired minstrelsy resound
In every clime, this scene to celebrate,
Spread for the mystic union of two worlds—
Scene of Life beauteous, blithesome, innocent,
Wedded to Death !

Nathless, not all in vain,
Mother divine, shall the sad torches burn
To light the agonized, far-roaming quest
Of thy bereavement ; nor quite fruitless fall
The scourge of thy displeasure on the fields ;
When, by that barren spectacle of woe
And image of thyself disconsolate
To pious intervention moved, the Father
(My faithful heralding invoked again)
Wrests from reluctant Erebus the bride
Seized as for sole possession : now as twain,
Alternate solace of the one-half year,
In equal sharing to thy bosom press'd.

PROLOGUE

O fortunate, benignant resting-place
And harbor to that wandering search forlorn ;
Chosen recipient of profoundest lore,
Won from renascent nature's grateful hand,
Happy Eleusis !—whose fane, consecrate
To the half-rescued and the half-consoled,
Mother and Daughter, shall conserve and guard,
Closing religious lips with seal of gold,
Their secret, who from mystic visions reap
Hopes that are sweeter ; from the awakening,
 through
The great transition, to the end unseen.

The hour draws nigh. The conscious soil awaits
Pressure of lightsome footsteps ; and each flower,
With melancholy chalice, droops and leans ;
As by divine anticipation prone
To yield its being up beneath the touch
Of fair immortal fingers.—Hark ! what strain
Of virginal voices this way floating breathes
Faint symptom of approach ? Ye nymphs of Ocean,
Parent sublime, how fittingly your choir
Surrounds the sweet Earth-daughter ; whilst not far,
Lull'd to forgetful, unsuspecting sleep,
The Mother rests ; nor should in dreams surmise



PERSEPHONE

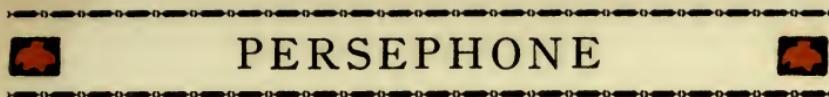


Peril mid those of her own impulse born,
Iris and crocus, violet, hyacinth ;
And ah ! fair tempter, charged with deathly spell,
Narcoma—thou the lure, *narkissoς*. O !
Too lovely emblem, fated to recall
The passing of this hour.

Now it behooves

To spurn the disc of dull, inferior earth,
Which the wing'd sandal hath not scorn'd to tread
Thus long, and seek ethereal spheres, unchoked
By the thick air of time and circumstance.
Ascend ! ascend !

[Exit]



PERSEPHONE

I

By the Borders of Ocean ; as in *Prologue*

OCEANIDES PERSEPHONE DEMETER

The lay of the OCEAN NYMPHS is sung behind the scenes by their LEADER, with refrain by all in unison.

(Song)

When oft these thoughts it may beseem

To crave the sanction of our sire,

Emerging from his quenchless stream

Gladly I lead my tuneful choir

{ With earthly spirits join'd in glee,

{ Demeter and Persephone.

Their smiling meadows comelier lie,

Whose edge our father's eddies lave,

Than pearls with crimson coral vie

Beneath his green translucent wave :

{ When the twain wander here with me,

{ Demeter and Persephone.

Gay chaplets to their brows we bind

Of flowers with sweetest fragrance fraught,

For ring-round dances deftly twined

To us by circling waters taught ;



PERSEPHONE



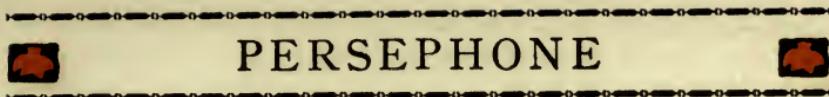
{ Nor they less frolicsome than we,
 { Demeter and Persephone.

The while in turn for us they make
 Light airs through piny verdure play,
Aeolian melodies awake
 In answer to my roundelay ;

{ As ours their bounding pulses free,
 { Demeter and Persephone.

Soon as yon cloud's soft splendor yields
 To deepening shades of dusky eve,
What powers caress the willing fields?
 Persuade each seedlet to conceive?
{ Lead forth the scion from the tree?—
 { Demeter and Persephone.

By heaven to earth's embraces sent
 Since order'd purposes begun,
The Daughter with the Mother blent—
 These move and breathe as two in one ;
{ Nor can such bond dissever'd be,
 { Demeter and Persephone.



PERSEPHONE

[Enter PERSEPHONE with OCEAN NYMPHS. She is at first attended closely by their LEADER, while the others remain apart, gathering flowers.]

PERSEPHONE

O ! how the scented air doth tempt to probe
Its secret in some petal'd casket hidden.

LEADER

Thy mother said, stray not far, whilst herself
By slumbrous mood o'ermaster'd turn'd to rest.

PERSEPHONE

Near ! near ! not far, coils of fine incense rise
As from some drowsy region trod in dreams—

LEADER

Ay, many a blossom prompteth us, that ever
Thou wert a dreamy child, Persephone.

PERSEPHONE

Some drowsy region where we rove not yet :
Where sleep might be our waking ; waking, sleep.



PERSEPHONE



LEADER

As now thy mother slumbers watchful, and thou
Dost grope unwatchful mid the scenes of light.

PERSEPHONE

Weird dimness closes round the light, and there
One golden starry visage burns alone.

LEADER

The flower hath charm'd thee ; and methinks in
truth
Of thee 't is worthy, for *thy* hands only sprung.
[*The LEADER withdraws to her companions.*]

PERSEPHONE

[*Bending over the narcissus*]

What spell,
Sweet flower ! what potent counsel strange
Thy winsome grace divine
With soul-beguiling fragrance could combine,
So toward unearthly visions of new change
My helpless fancy to compel !



PERSEPHONE



Once more ! once more
Ensnared in dark bewildering somnolence
 Reflective reason halts ! Once more
With centred sight intense
 My ravish'd spirit seems
 Through the reopen'd eye of dreams
This sovereign heavenly blossom to behold
New-throned mid sombre, grave magnificence !

Lo !
Free of its sever'd stem
Shines the corolla as a diadem
 Clasping a queenly brow :
 Once fair as day, but now
Pale with a sad mysterious light ;
 Dark-eyed and beautiful as night,
Half of immortal, half of earthly mould.—
 O, rouse me ! let me wake !
 Myself that crown to take,—
 Myself shall wear it—

[As she stoops with both hands outstretched to pluck the flower, the gigantic figure of PLUTO, whose black steeds come partially into view beyond the cliff, advances swiftly and silently behind her, seizes her by the waist and bears her away.]



PERSEPHONE



PERSEPHONE

O, whither !—release me !

O, save me !

My mother, save me ! O, where? where art thou?
[Enter DEMETER from the side near the group of nymphs.]

DEMETER

[To the NYMPHS, who are in commotion]

That voice ! that cry !—

[Looking about her] Persephone ! my child !—
Not with you?

LEADER

O, mother, mother Demeter !

DEMETER

What? where?

LEADER

Thither ! thither, the cliff !
Borne by an awful shape !

DEMETER

O heaven !

Shape human?

LEADER

Human? what is that?

Art thou, Demeter, human?



PERSEPHONE



DEMETER

Too nearly, though immortal !—
Thou also, O my child !—But lost? lost?
Nay ! nay, the immortal part
Loss cannot know ;
And that which links her to this sphere,
A mother's quest shall find it, far or near !—
Ye powers above which have this fate decreed,
Wait ! wait, and ye shall bend
Before Demeter !
And thou black earth,
If thy broad bosom hath
Ken of Persephone,
Let me forever scour it to the end !
By night the torch, by day the tireless eye—
And pour my sorrow and my wrath,
Fell mixture, far and wide !
They, too, by losing shall my anguish try.
This bleeding heart
Throbs not without requital of its pain !
Forth ! forth !
To seek, to wail, to languish, to regain !

[Exit]



PERSEPHONE



OCEAN NYMPHS

(*Song*)

Now no longer may we stand
On the unfamiliar land :
Father Ocean calls us home
To the grottoes and the foam.
There upon our days no strange
 Shock of parting and profound
Sense of melancholy change
 Comes to mar their blissful round.

His slow-circling waters deep
Round the earth untroubled sweep.
Its impatient runlets flee
To his endless harmony.
There no discord breaks our dreams,
 Robs the heart of fancies fair ;
One day like another seems,
 Our delights are always there.



PERSEPHONE



With his partner in the skies
Ocean's pulses fall and rise,
To her true responses near
From the crescent to the sphere.
No vague signs our pathway cross,
 Searching grove and wilderness ;
No regrets of love and loss
 On our virgin bosoms press.

When these nightly thoughts incline
Toward our stars, some strain divine
Wafted from that heavenly choir
Compasseth our heart's desire.
Time nor task our father knows,
 For no peaceful end he yearns :
From itself his current flows
 And unto itself returns.

[*Exeunt*]



PERSEPHONE



II

By the Grove of the Hamadryads and the Mansion
made Desolate.

DEMETER

SELENE

HAMADRYADS

(*Dirge*)

[*Heard at eventide in the autumn season, of voices
within the mansion with open windows*]

FIRST VOICE

(*of aged man*)

It was not time ;
Not yet 't was time.

SECOND VOICE

(*of aged woman*)

So in his early prime—
O ! in his prime.

FIRST VOICE

Ere now it came not so.

Ourselves were ripe to go ;
Ourselves to fade, to sleep.



PERSEPHONE



SECOND VOICE

This thing we do not know.
O ! why for sudden blow,
Why must we weep?

CHORUS

(of mingled voices)

Themselves were ripe to go.
They do not know,
For sudden cruel blow
 Why they must weep.
Ere now it came not so.
Themselves were ripe to go ;
 To fade, to sleep.

FIRST VOICE

Not yet, not yet had he
Lived, of himself to see
 New lives arise and bloom,
But by an early doom
 His own laid low.



PERSEPHONE



SECOND VOICE

The axe laid to the tree !—
O ! for what cause are we
Lingering in vacant gloom?
And he swept to the tomb
From youthful glow !

CHORUS

They lingering in the gloom,
And he swept to the tomb
From youthful glow.
The axe laid to the tree.
He had not lived to see
New lives arise and bloom,
But by an early doom
His own laid low.

[*The funeral procession following the bier moves from the mansion. As it passes from the scene DEMETER, in mourning garb and bearing a smoking torch, enters on the other side by the grove.*]

DEMETER

Ay ! these perceive, the autumn of the world
Portendeth more than harvest and fair fruits.



PERSEPHONE



Not every shorn leaf that comes whirling down
Hath of a timely spring remembrance, but
Full many a bourgeon did arrive too late.
O, have ye dream'd, ye mortal sojourners,
That this long human childhood should endure?
And, while ourselves of deathless stamp must groan
And grope with the half-kindled torch, that ye
Might through a life of imperception reap
The fruitage of experience sans the pain!—
Nor, if the awakening bend your necks to earth,
Blame ye Demeter, who herself by fate
Struggles enmesh'd and sees not to the end.—
O! wherefore should my share in this fell maze
Of mingled day and darkness be that framed
For agonies of severance and despair?
Empty as yonder desolate mansion feels
The heart that did with double fulness beat.
Where art thou, O my daughter? thou the fairest,
The freshest portion of my being, torn
Rudely away, leaving this mournful remnant
That rather should in nothingness dissolve
Than thus cry blindly for its dearer part!—
Come forth! come forth, some spirit, some deity
That hast a far-discrimining sense denied
To this bewilder'd weary questioner:



PERSEPHONE



Or from the skies or from the rotting mould
Heap'd by the boles of these denuded trees
Come forth ! Tell me ; O, tell me,
Where is my daughter? where?
Where is Persephone?

[DEMETER sinks to her knee as the full moon just rising suddenly emerges from a bank of clouds and floods the empty mansion with light. At the head of the stairway leading to its main entrance the MOON GODDESS appears, wearing a saffron robe and a crown of silver.]

SELENE

Demeter, parent of seasons, giver to earth
Of its green cheer and freshness, why thyself
Dost make such moan in dismal garb forlorn?

DEMETER

O, would, Selene, above this soil thy lot
Of virginal remoteness had been mine !

SELENE

Slight not thy nearer destiny, Demeter ;
Nor deem my cold tranquility worth more
Than thy true motherhood with all its pains.



PERSEPHONE

DEMETER

So easy is it for them that have not felt,
The worth of others' feeling to apprise.

SELENE

Yet 't was thine own plaint, that not yet thou seest
The end whither thou tendest.—But *my* eye
Leaves of the earthly tract no coigne unview'd.

DEMETER

O ! bring'st thou, then, from that all-seeing round
Some tiding, O Selene, of my child?

SELENE

Not by this vesper radiance alone
Scan I the nether orb, but in full day
With silvery shy effulgence 't is survey'd—

DEMETER

And nowhere to that circling argent, nor
To the pale saffron halo beam'd a sign?

SELENE

With many a sidewise glance, or face to face,
By plain or mountain, or by the salty edge
Of Ocean heaving to my bosom's spell.



PERSEPHONE



DEMETER

There, there fell on my anguish'd waking ear
The vanishing cry of lost Persephone.

SELENE

Not at that hour my slender crescent hung
Nigh to those flowery borders. I saw not
Thy daughter's ravisher nor herself bewray'd.

DEMETER

O ! even, then, to the whole monthly vigil's end
From thee, Selene, could that face be hidden?

SELENE

Of the overworld no denizen is she ;
Earth's sunny surface, whence her joyous hand
The rose and lily pluck'd, knows her no more.

DEMETER

O ! whither tend thy ominous words, Selene?

SELENE

In the underworld thy daughter now, Demeter,

DEMETER

Say it not ! heaven's offspring cannot brook the tale.



PERSEPHONE



SELENE

Sits, the pale consort of its lord.—Such doom
In her swift trackless passing read I clear
And in the Father's prescient, grave designs ;
Wherein thyself, Demeter, mightst not share,
Since in thyself those purposes should find
A suffering instrument.

DEMETER

O, truly chosen !

SELENE

Some bond there needed, to link inseparably
The unthinking human world with the profound
Mysterious sphere to Pluto's charge assign'd.
Though deathless be thy daughter, yet she dieth ;
Ravish'd from life she liveth still.

DEMETER

O fate !

And pitiless schemes inscrutable, to pierce
And rend in twain this quivering mother heart,
For that likewise each human parent might learn
Some secret of new pangs.—But for them, too,
As for myself, will I reclaim to earth—



PERSEPHONE



To earth, my province and my tender charge,
Through its own devastation, its own pain
This intimate inseparably link'd bond,
Our child, *my* child Persephone !

[*Kneeling again and smiting the ground repeatedly and powerfully with her smouldering torch*]

Hear thou ! hear thou !

Aidôneus ! Aidôneus !

Hear ! in thy dark demesnes,
Whose shore, being deathless I may not invade
Save with this stern, sure menace ; hear !

Yield up ! yield up thy prey !

Aidôneus ! Aidôneus !

Hear thou ! hear thou !

Yield up ! yield up !

Thou, thou shalt heed Demeter.

[*Rising, she extends the torch upward.*]

Hear now, ye powers supernal ; between whom
And the infernal lies this sodden earth,
Whereof by fell concession ye pretend
The weal to foster : hear ! hear ye Demeter !
Now on the same earth, your fond care, shall fall
Foul blight and famine, drouth, and vegetal death.
The tree shall wither and the brook run dry.



PERSEPHONE



All things shall droop and sink ; not one shall spring.
Through a weary, long, intolerable year
Man, beast, and plant shall hunger, thirst, and faint,
Till for deliverance yourselves cry out
In fervent supplication ; nor shall that
Avail, save in the promised end.—'T is said.

SELENE

Not by dark wood, nor cave, nor desert sands
In all my veering pathway o'er the lands
Wrath fiercer have I seen nor grief more wild
Than the robb'd parent mourning for its child.

DEMETER

Love left unto its own
 Of anger hath no need ;
What vengeance can atone
 When these fond fibres bleed !

SELENE

Though on the innocent such ire descend?—
Could gentle dryads thy proud soul offend?



PERSEPHONE



DEMETER

The dryad and the gnome
Must answer for their birth :
On earth they found a home,
Their portion is of earth.

SELENE

For its appointed hour each portion waits ;
Thou add'st untimely passing to their fates.

[*The HAMADRYADS have gradually become dimly visible among the trees.*]

A DRYAD

(*sings*)

If so my tree must perish
My own life-course is run ;
Hers is the soul I cherish,
My tree and I are one.
Living I would not leave her,
Nor dying can bereave her ;
No sigh I breathe shall grieve her ;
Our task of love is done.



PERSEPHONE



DEMETER

Ye win a happier lot,
When both to rest are gone,
Than they who perish not,
But, parted, must live on.

SELENE

Not two in one, but one aloof, alone—
It only can eternal calmness own.

ANOTHER DRYAD

We two were born together,
This tender tree and I.
In rain and sunny weather
We grew beneath the sky.
We bathed us in the showers,
We laugh'd among the flowers
Together through the hours ;
Together we will die.

DEMETER

Together wakes a tone
Of rapture in the heart.
Ye lived—and have not known
That other word, *apart*.



PERSEPHONE



SELENE

Twice blest the soul which through unending years
Neither the one word nor the other hears.

ANOTHER DRYAD

When autumn breezes sever
These brown leaves from the stem
It is a sorrow ever
To say farewell to them.
This time my tree is taking
The sleep that hath no waking,
And I my moan am making
Her final requiem.

DEMETER

And if ye rest in peace
Your sorrows are forgot.
They who must seek release
In memory, find it not.

SELENE

Till, haply, lifted from this troublous scene
Their spirits hover in my heights serene.

[The moon is again hidden by clouds and the scene left in darkness.]



PERSEPHONE



III

At the home of EUMOLPUS in Eleusis. The Council of Elders seated at the vestibule.

EUMOLPUS COUNCILLORS AN AGED MINSTREL
CALLITHOË DEMO DEMETER METANEIRA
IAMBÉ SERVANTS

EUMOLPUS

My lords, the time is ripe—as 't is not long
Since stood likewise the increase of our fields
In veritable ripeness—the hour 's at hand
When for that easy-gather'd store we pay
To the benignant, ever watchful Mother
Due offering of thanks. Mark yonder pile,
Thatch'd guaranty of barley thresh'd and housed ;
Yon rows of oil-jars ; honey strain'd, milk flowing
Furnish the tithe acceptable, we the praise.

FIRST COUNCILLOR

Praise verily and choicest fruits we owe
For past care to Demeter. But not less
The future craves of sparing kindly grace
From the same hand divine. Signs are to note
Of stress and dearth ; too long, too dry creeps on
The rainless interval : some springs run low.



PERSEPHONE



SECOND COUNCILLOR

Ay, for the winter plowing, sire, the wheat,
An anxious thought I harbor. So the kine
Seem restless and athirst.

EUMOLPUS

'T is well ; 't is well.

The saving deities will not slight this land.
To us their favor hath been ever near,
At heart their worship. Mother and Daughter need
No farther than Eleusis press, to find
Of earthly homes the surest.—Go we now
Each to his central hearth, the household shrine.
There with full hand your solemn gifts renew,
With vows of deprecation, if need be.
Both shall avail, should no mischance belie
My hopeful auguries.

THIRD COUNCILLOR

Fair omens wait

Even now, Eumolpus, on thy word. Behold
Our herald of cheer, the bard. [Enter MINSTREL]

EUMOLPUS

Unwelcome never,
Now in strict season, hail, sir minstrel ! hail !
Hail to thy harp.



PERSEPHONE



MINSTREL

O gracious chief, each hour,
Each season hath its tones, its harmony
Of mingled promise and regret.

EUMOLPUS

Ay, true.
We sit to celebrate it ; sound the strain.

MINSTREL

[*Sweeping the strings of his harp, sings.*]

If autumn have a sadder side
I care not now to sing it ;
My theme is happy harvest-tide,
And grateful words I bring it.

Behind is panting summer fled,
Safe lies the slighted quarry.
Fast by her flowery lair hath sped
The seasons' eager foray ;

While surly winter stands at bay,
Biding the foremost comer—
An hour that holds apart the day
Of winter and of summer.



PERSEPHONE



The huntsman's horn an echo leaves,
In plaintive cadence falling.—
The reaper pauses mid the sheaves,
His ancient dream recalling.

Faint whiffs afloat of woodland fire
Vague memories awaken ;
The spring-tide of his heart's desire,
Old fancies long forsaken.

Through hazy air he sees afar
The serried summits quiver.—
Then nearer signs the vision mar :
Two graves beside the river ;

The grain-field of its bounty shorn,
The vine stript of its cluster ;
No bird-note on the breezes borne,
No flower to lend its lustre.—

SECOND COUNCILLOR

Truly, methinks our singer gravitates
Toward the unwelcome side.



PERSEPHONE



EUMOLPUS

Too many years

Teach him the reaper's lesson.—Nay, sing on !

MINSTREL

If autumn have a sadder side

Why turn I now to sing it?

My theme is happy harvest-tide,

And cheerful words I bring it.

What though the grape no longer glows,

By leafy covert shielded?

The wine-press with the nectar flows

Its ripen'd splendor yielded.

That rivalry of trampling feet

Each youth and maid rejoices.

In vintage toil their pastimes meet,

I hear their frolic voices.

For them bare field and fallen leaf

No solitude betoken ;

Theirs be the yet ungarner'd sheaf,

Earnest of vows unspoken.



PERSEPHONE



[Enter from without CALLITHOË and DEMO : the former leading DEMETER disguised as an aged needy woman ; the latter bearing an urn of water. The MINSTREL sets aside his harp.]

EUMOLPUS

Not in song only,
So it doth seem, shall youth confirm the steps
Of melancholy age.—A visitor,
Callithoe ?

CALLITHOË

A sad one, O my father !
A story of sorrows.

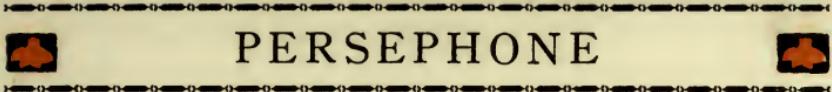
EUMOLPUS

It shall be heard within.

Our festal rite preparing for the Mother
Shall stand for consolation.—And thou, too,
Good minstrel, enter with them for thy share.

[The three women go into the house, followed by the MINSTREL.]

Again, my lords, the casual guest reminds us,
For plenteous store what recompense we owe.
Rise we now ; and to our several services
Disperse and give observance. Fare you well !



PERSEPHONE

[*The COUNCILLORS rise and go out. EUMOLPUS goes out on the other side. The scene changes to an interior, discovering the Court, an oblong area upon the ground, dimly lighted though partly open to the sky. This area is surrounded by a raised floor and roofed colonnade, with seats, and doors communicating with the several apartments of the dwelling; also a loom and spinning-wheels. In the centre of the court stands a large altar; and near it are set as offerings fruits, grain, jars of oil, wine, honey, flowers in pots. All the members of the household except EUMOLPUS himself:— the wife and the two daughters and numerous domestics, men and women, including IAMBE, are seen standing on the ground about the altar. Their attitude is of tranquil expectation. Farther forward, upon the raised floor, on one side is seated the disguised DEMETER, crouching low with mournful mien ; on the other side stands the MINSTREL with his harp. Every person, except DEMETER, wears a wreath of laurel. A youthful attendant stands on either side of the altar, one holding a lighted torch.—Enter at the rear EUMOLPUS, wearing a wreath. He speaks as he comes to a stand by the altar.]*



PERSEPHONE



EUMOLPUS

Now let every tongue be still,
And your conscious silence fill
With a reverence profound
All the air these walls surround.

[*At a sign from the master one of the attendants pours oil upon the altar, while the other sets it aflame.*]

The Father first we glorify,
Cloud-wrapt, dwelling in the sky.—
But thou need'st no loud acclaim,
Nor to speak thy mighty name,
Crave thy presence in our prayer,
For thy will is everywhere.

Demeter, Cora, Bacchus : triple company,
One spirit breathed in three :
If, where Salamis' dark brow
On our curving bay is bent,
To Eleusis with benign intent
Ye ever came, come now !

MANY VOICES IN UNISON

{ Demeter, Cora, Bacchus : triple company,
One spirit breathed in three :
If by Salamis' dark brow
Ye ever to Eleusis came, come now !



PERSEPHONE



EUMOLPUS

Demeter, Cora, Bacchus : triple company,
One spirit breathed in three :
Of your gifts we keep not all ;
To yourselves the choicest fall.
Those no blemish came to mar
Emblems of perfection are—
Of your gracious bounty, sent
For our zest and aliment.

Milk of heifer ranging free,
On whose neck no yoke may rest ;
Of the petal-probing bee
Honey from wild blossoms press'd ;
Crystal streams from virgin spring :
All with thankful hearts we bring.

Drawn from parent stock sincere
Thy untemper'd cordial flows,
Bacchus ; and the fruit is here,
Dearest that Eleusis knows,—
Where by zones of yellow grain
The gray olive dots the plain.

[*At the intervals of the recital the several offerings have been placed upon the altar.*]



PERSEPHONE



Mother benign,
Thy bosom holds
Secrets divine
That earth unfolds—

What powers assure
Life yet to be,
To us obscure,
Possess'd by thee.

We score the soil,
We fling the seed ;
All-vain our toil,
Shouldst thou not heed.

Not by some chance
Each germ upsprings ;
Our sustenance
Thy bounty brings.—

By turf or tree,
By tame or wild,
We praise with thee
Cora thy child.



PERSEPHONE

One soul, one will,
Ye are not twain ;
Attuned to thrill
The same refrain.

That unison
Our blessing prove.
O ! breathe it on
The fields we love.

What hazards hurt,
What mischiefs mar,
Avert ! avert !
Hold them afar.

No want know'st thou,
Parent divine ;
Yet to our vow
Thine heart incline

In gracious mood—
Gifts as of yore,
Full oft renew'd,
And more and more.

[The altar-flame is again kindled.]



PERSEPHONE



The same who doth beginnings lend
Claims our homage of the end.
When on hallow'd names we call
'T is the Father crowns them all ;
All the gleanings of our days
In the fateful balance weighs.
Therefore now in final turn
His flames on the altar burn.
Your unprison'd voices break
Stillness held for harvest's sake.
Taste its rich inviting store
And the temper'd nectar pour ;
Be your mutual greetings blent
In recover'd merriment.

[There is lively movement and the hum of mingled voices. They sit and partake of the fruit and bread distributed. Wine is mixed with water in the wassail bowl and served in cups. DEMETER, though still in dejected attitude, partakes sparingly of bread, but declines the wine offered her.]

METANEIRA

Poor woman, have cheer ; be not afraid ; put by
The mournful thoughts that cloud your aged brow.
Mortals must bear it when sad fates arrive,

 PERSEPHONE 

Yet seek assuagement. 'T is Eumolpus' house,
Who with just hand and charitable heart,
And by wise compeers seconded, protects
The people of Eleusis. No poor wanderer
(For all come in the Father's name) goes hence
Unsoothed, uncomforted. Tell us your name ;
Whence you have wander'd hither.

CALLITHOË

Mother, she said
Her name is Doso and she comes from Crete.

METANEIRA

So far? O strange !

EUMOLPUS

Good woman, we fain would hear
From your own lips the story of these woes.
Speak and reward us.

DEMETER

Noble chief, 't were long
From the beginning to the end to trace
My path of sorrows. But the immediate tale
Is of the angry sea, whose hostile edge
And cliffs of flint shatter'd the vessel's side



PERSEPHONE



Wherein from that far Cretan isle we sail'd.
A whole household were we. For, though myself
Bound but to menial service, it had been long
And intimate—and not one other now
Lives of that happy group. O ! would the fierce
Unconquerable tempest that impell'd
Our bark upon those adamantine shores
Had made me its first victim,—this aged heart
Still beating to deplore the loss of them
Who least deserved their fate. And most I mourn
The gentle child which 't was my task to tend
From morn till eve, and through the stilly night
Unto its helpless needs to minister.—
Alas ! not always did such order hold,
That youth and childhood should first sink and fade.
But now the fishers whose brave efforts sought
To cheat the billows, rescuing me alone,
Brought me to Thoricus ; and thence I wander'd,
Till by the fountain whence your daughters drew
Pure water for Demeter's festival
Weary I sat, despairing.

METANEIRA

O, weep not,

Poor soul ! nor think the source of hope runs dry.



PERSEPHONE



For 't is the parent of hopes, whose rite some breeze
Of shifting fortune sent you here to share.
'T is she who, when chill frost bites and lays low
Soft, swaying foliage wither'd to the root,
Inspires our trust in its rebirth. And now
Deem the sweet child that perish'd found again.
An infant son have I, late-born, well loved,
Blooming with promise. You shall be his nurse,
Tend him even as that one. And mayhap
When he attains to conscious age, his thoughts
Will seek you gratefully and make your lot
Envied of many.—Is he not yet awake,
Iambe?

IAMBE

Nay, he sleeps, my mistress, still.

METANEIRA

Later he shall be brought.—

EUMOLPUS

But there needs cheer
To break this sadness, Metaneira. Methinks
Our minstrel guest hath not yet brought his song
To strict conclusion.—Let us know the end.



PERSEPHONE

MINSTREL

[*After a brief prelude upon the harp, resumes his song.*]

If autumn have a sadder side
I choose not now to sing it ;
My theme is happy harvest-tide,
And grateful words I bring it.

Your praises of the Mother sound
While halcyon days still linger ;
Ere yet the wintry wind, unbound,
Has touch'd with shriveling finger

The last grace of the tender year,
Its dulcet breathings banish'd ;
Ere the last fitful gleam of cheer
From smiling skies has vanish'd.

The mother quail still stays to call
Her sturdy brood together ;
The lizard still basks on the wall ;
The crane still preens his feather,

Till soon he span the southern sea,
To Libyan shores descending ;
Some lone cicada pipes his glee ;
Some swallow southward wending.



PERSEPHONE



O, wait ! and turn not to deplore
The charm of days now ended ;
The nightingale's sad lay, no more
With vesper stillness blended.

Mourn not ! What though the self-same bird
Return to thrill us never ?
That heavenly plaint shall yet be heard,
That tale retold forever.

Not the same flowers unfold again,
Once more the meadows glisten ;
Not the same zephyrs whisper, when
Once more, entranced, ye listen.

Your minstrel shall not tarry long,
Soon with the sere leaf lying.
New voices will repeat his song,
From age to age undying.

[*There is silence and a long pause, till EUMOLPUS, filling a cup from the bowl and presenting it to the MINSTREL, speaks.]*



PERSEPHONE



EUMOLPUS

Thy song shall live indeed,
All-honor'd bard, when we have pass'd, who now
By the weird spell of silence sit enthralld.
And for thyself, may many a year its score
Of leafy generations cast to earth,
Ere to new hands thine ageless harp descend.—
But—for the present is a festal hour,
To man and maid for respite warranted—
Go forth all, and the sense of toil dissolve
In mirth and pleasantry.

[*The SERVANTS, all but LAMBE, bestir themselves briskly and go out at the rear, followed by the MINSTREL and EUMOLPUS with his two daughters. METANEIRA goes out, entering one of the chambers at the side.*]

LAMBE

[*To DEMETER still sunk in melancholy*]

Wake up ! be lively, grandam !

[*DEMETER shakes her head.*]

'T is good ; shake off these megrims ; I have store
Of cheery tales that bring forgetfulness.

Listen ; I tell one.

[*DEMETER gives sign of aversion.*]



PERSEPHONE



There was once an old woman scratch'd badly
with briars

Forgot to remember, "All Cretans are liars."

Spun a yarn in the style of a season'd sea-rover :
A ship stove to pieces, the Cretans spill'd over.
[DEMETER *raises her head and looks curiously at IAMBE.*]

Herself all afloat in the cold briny water,
Till safe to the shore a bold fisherman brought her.

Beat her way to Eleusis through brambles and
briars,

But forgot to remember, All Cretans are liars.

So, if she *was* a Cretan, we could not believe her ;
And if she was not, then she play'd the deceiver.
[DEMETER, *straightening up, gazes at the speaker with a cheerful look.*]

This fable imposes a duty ungracious,
To warn all old women more glib than veracious :

Lay the scene of your highly improbable story
Not in Crete, but in some more remote territory.

[DEMETER *smiles.*]

DEMETER

Damsel, what is thy name?



PERSEPHONE

IAMBE

Iambe.

DEMETER

Bee?

You are Bee?

IAMBE

O no ! not Youarbe ;

I-am-be.

DEMETER

[Smiling again] Ah ! you are *Iambe*.

IAMBE

I am—be sure.—

My father was a Cretan king ; his name
Was *Anapaistos*, not unknown to fame.

My mother *Dactyl* shared with him the throne,
To fond reciprocation ever prone ;

Yet when he wish'd her near for work or play
Her steps would always turn the other way.

My sister *Trochee* and myself, likewise,
Could never look each other in the eyes,
Our thoughts so strangely centred in another,
Spondee, our irresponsible big brother.

PERSEPHONE

Though most religious, even when most drunk,
His wits in utter slothfulness were sunk.

Trochee must run ; *Spondee* could only crawl ;
I had to walk or not proceed at all.

Alas ! there was for us no common ground.

The bards are busy, but have not yet found
The proper measures to make both ends meet
And set my family upon its feet.

[Enter METANEIRA carrying an infant in her arms.]

METANEIRA

[*Passing the child to DEMETER who receives it graciously*]

Take, take your precious charge, good woman ; see
How willingly he comes !

DEMETER

Yes ; and his name ?

METANEIRA

Triptolemus.

DEMETER

Thrice spoil'd ?

METANEIRA

Nay, nay ! thrice cherish'd.

Boon of the thrice plow'd field.



PERSEPHONE



IAMBE

Yet to be thresh'd.

METANEIRA

Iambe, spare thy quips !—Come forth, come forth !

IAMBE

My quips can cure. [*As the two go out.*]

DEMETER

[*Left alone, sings in low tones to the child she is holding.*]

Open little eyes in wonder ;

Open, open wide.

Little lips, they move asunder.

What strange face untried

Doth of a new mother seem ?

Triptoleme.

New and old have found each other :

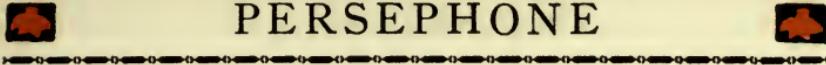
Thrice true to his name,

Thrice endear'd the people's brother

To these arms he came,

Lost or losing to redeem,

Triptoleme.



PERSEPHONE

Draw a charmèd circle round them ;
All within it save.
Fear nor famine shall confound them.
By Eleusis' wave
Every ill forefended deem,
Triptoleme.

He shall recompense Demeter,
When, by him beguiled,
One by one the nations greet her,
Change their aspects wild
For an amity supreme,
Triptoleme.

Little eyes are prone to slumber ;
Little lips can smile.
Stately visions without number
Hover nigh the while,
When immortal children dream,
Triptoleme.

[The dimly lighted scene has grown darker. Voices of merriment are still heard without.]



PERSEPHONE

IV

By the Entrance to the Lower World.

HERMES

PLUTO

PERSEPHONE

HERMES

Mine errand let the pallid asphodel,
By the gray twilight shimmering, consecrate.—
Whither my steps are bent, shall for a sign
About their path this ghostly flower be strewn,
When, to a deeper vision moved, men seek
To pierce the veil that shrouds their mortal ken,
Feigning a field of asphodel beyond.

It is the way to *death*. Nor may, of those
Who from abodes celestial view afar
The strange complex of transitory lives,
Another than myself o'erstep the bound.
From light to gloom the steps are few ; and I
Descending thither have already spann'd
The main ethereal distance, till thus nigh
To the infernal gates, pausing I wait
For the decisive moment to pass down
Into his presence, to whose ear straightway
The Eternal Father's will shall be convey'd.



PERSEPHONE



Now on the tardy verge of winter hangs
The sun's relenting disc. Yet by that sign
Not as before do watchful mortals read
Hope and recover'd cheer. Still on their fields
Blight presses, drouth and famine lower ; no beam
Of vernal promise rends the pall.—Then they
To the supernal powers their suppliant cries
Uplifting, from Demeter's vengeful stroke
In piteous appeal, did importune,
Conquer'd our sympathies. One by one we sought
The Mother's presence, earthward speeding ; laid
Our gifts before Demeter ; promised all
That might subdue a proud immortal heart.
But to each fruitless mission 't was the same
Stern answer : " Think me not one of yourselves.
My foot the Olympian threshold shall not cross ;
Nor shall the stricken earth yield of its fruits,
Till these eyes see Persephone restored."—
Then straight the Father on my zeal enjoin'd
To penetrate the nether gloom, and call
Back unto day in his almighty name
The bride erstwhile conceded.



PERSEPHONE



Here I stand.

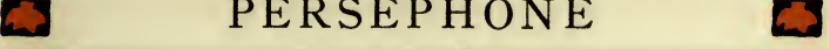
O, who but for constraint inexorable
Would pass among the shadowy denizens
Of death's domain, even though by prompt return
Deliverance be assured?—Already I hear
Cadence of ghostly voices, which, not long
From living freshness flitted forth, nor yet
Given the oblivion craved, do thinly echo
Their chorus of regretful agonies.

VOICES

[*Heard chanting behind the scenes*]

Wandering ; waiting. Where
Out of a dark despair
Rest may we find?
Some saving power, O ! send
Forgetfulness, to end
This frenzied mind.

O ! would we knew not, where
Or who we are, or were !
Help, help us to forget.
I *think* ; I cannot see.
Lost one, I think of thee,
Remembering yet.



PERSEPHONE

HERMES

Ah ! have ye now the worth perceived of that
For which in life your thoughtless fancies yearn'd?
As children, when their sweetmeats are consumed,
Cry to possess them still. If your lives held
Naught profitable, they were well come to naught.
Or, if perchance ye deem'd them good, ye *had*
them—

Once, and for all.—But chant not of despair.
Near where ye flit the stream of Lethe flows.
Thence shall ye drink and in oblivion
Find peace. Forgetfulness, its blessed fount
Not too soon have wise powers before you set,
That for a few sad moments ye might know
The folly of those earthly cravings. Then,
When the Lethean waters pass your lips,
Yourselves ye are no more. Live on ;
Live on—if it be deem'd so ; but yourselves
Exist no longer : all your fears shall cease.

[The chanting is heard again, growing fainter and fainter.]



PERSEPHONE



VOICES

To Lethe, Lethe's river,
O ! waft us ; and deliver
The imprison'd soul.
Blest fount, end this probation
Of thought without sensation.
Waves of oblivion, roll
O'er us. Quench, quench forever
The flames of memory. Sever
The tie of long ago,
Of penances infernal ;
And for repose eternal,
Lethe, sweet Lethe, flow.

HERMES

Farewell, then. Not thyself, but now thou art
Another, if so be thou art at all.—
For me, mine errand loiters. Downward ! down !
To the day-beam, for a brief hour, farewell !
[Exit, entering a chasm at one side.—The scene changes. At first it is wrapt in total darkness. Gradually light appears at the centre, leaving the surrounding space still dark. In the central illumination the forms of PLUTO and PERSEPHONE are discovered, seated side by side upon elevated thrones, their faces wearing the hue cast by fire-light.]



PERSEPHONE



PLUTO

Here—not as there—stability unswerving,
Repose, conclusion, safe authority.
They, in their upper world, sway to and fro,
Cherish their petty plans—resolve them here.

PERSEPHONE

To cherish is worth much, while cherishing.
Once found, concluded, what avails solution?

PLUTO

Of past and future vainly to reck no longer
Should seem of such avail, that to our bourn
'T were meet to press and hasten, not as now
Shrinking ignore the ill, defer the cure.

PERSEPHONE

Why crave a remedy for that which seems,
Mere semblance though it be, to heal itself?

PLUTO

Illusions, which our kindred powers above
Implant, encourage in the world they rule.
Ourselves, stern though our mien, deceive not, lay
No snares to entangle ; solemn truth is here.



PERSEPHONE



PERSEPHONE

For me, illusion shames solemnity.
Once I possess'd my share, more humble then.

PLUTO

Humility suits not, Persephone,
The sway whereof thou art participant.

PERSEPHONE

Rather a child fann'd by the fickle wind
Than queen of a dead realm helpless to change.

PLUTO

Ah ! reconciled not yet. Time, time shall win thee.
Of it there is enough.—But stay ! what comes ?

[At one side there opens a space of light in the surrounding darkness, revealing HERMES who stands forth toward PLUTO and PERSEPHONE.]

HERMES

Pluto, dread ruler of the shades, I come
Bearing new message from the living world.

PLUTO

Not often, Hermes, falls to us such honor
Of condescension as thy visit lends.



PERSEPHONE



HERMES

Mine errand is, as the appointed guide
Of souls in passage 'twixt our sphere and thine,
By the supremest order, to conduct
Persephone back to the upper realm ;
That, setting eyes upon her child once more,
Demeter, the Mother, may be reconciled
To her immortal kindred, and forbear
By earthly ruin, death of scion and seed,
All grace of human homage to suppress.
That wrath inflexible Eleusis now,
Her chosen harbor of bereavement, shelters.

PLUTO

Order supreme, sublime, who shall withstand?
No choice remains. Yet even your Highest must
bend
Before Necessity, the arm of Fate.
By fate already union inviolable,
A bond no countermand may wholly sever,
Was 'twixt these two worlds consummated, when
Demeter's daughter, once conceded, came
To the embrace of death. Even as frail men
By the pomegranate-seed do symbolize



PERSEPHONE



Their marriage-tie forsooth as one that binds
Forever.—Therefore, Persephone, though now
To thy glad mother's breast thou may'st return,
Bearing the boon of teeming hours sore craved
By mortals and their patron deities
And by the weary, starveling shell of earth ;
Yet through each half-year only shall endure
This upward impulse swelling in thy heart.
Again, again at the due moment, thy thoughts—
Not then as now aspiring—shall swing back
Hither, impel thee downward.

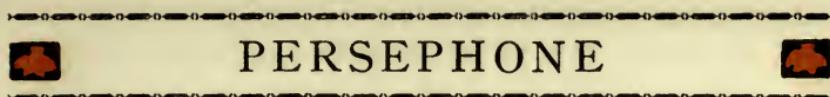
PERSEPHONE

Be it so !—

But at this hour my fluttering soul upsprings,
As when in sunny childish wanderings
The waken'd butterfly I saw unfold
From mouldy cerements his wings of gold.

PLUTO

Then, once his little season sped, the chill
Of dissolution smites with sudden thrill.
Quickly to earth his stiffen'd wing descends ;
The crawling worm that hovering glory ends.



PERSEPHONE

PERSEPHONE

Once more by Ocean's marge I seem to rove,
With sea-nymphs seek our flowery treasure-trove.
My mother sleeps, lull'd by the purling stream ;
The white cloud sails and silvery eddies gleam.

PLUTO

Once more the fragrant tempter's fatal smile
Beams forth benign, unfailing to beguile.—
The fickle nymphs flee to their sheltering wave ;
Thine, the all-harboring hospice of the grave.

HERMES

[Extending his winged wand gently toward PERSEPHONE who, as in a trance, rises from her throne and steps down toward him]

This wand the Everlasting's mandate heeds ;
Or toward the dark, or toward the light it leads.

PLUTO

Few thither, hither many their passage wend ;
There a beginning, here the appointed end.



PERSEPHONE



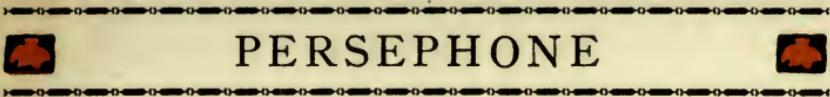
PERSEPHONE

O ! now some heavenly ray methinks I see
Piercing this foul, black-crusted canopy.—
Now, now soft vapory tresses fleck the sky ;
The wood-dove calls and vernal breezes sigh.

PLUTO

Speed thee some while illusion's airy spell ;
Brief absence claims no grave, prolong'd farewell.

[The seated figure of PLUTO becomes enveloped in shadow and disappears. PERSEPHONE surrounded by a halo of light follows HERMES out.]



PERSEPHONE

V

By the House of Eumolpus

CHILDREN IAMBE METANEIRA CALLITHOË
DEMO EUMOLPUS COUNCILLORS
DEMETER IRIS

[Enter from without a throng of CHILDREN, boys and girls of various ages. They carry small billets of wood suspended by strings, upon which they strike with another stick, producing a musical clatter. They halt in front of the house, and as their LEADER, a boy older than the rest, begins to chant his lay, the others cease their noise.]

LEADER

The swallow ! the swallow !
The swallow has come, she is here ;
Bringing with her the beautiful hours,
The beautiful year.

[A pause; clatter by the chorus.]

The swallow ! the swallow !
O ! the swallow is here.
Purple back, belly white,
From wealthy home she begs a mite.—



PERSEPHONE



Toss out, toss out a honey-cake ;
A tiny cup of wine,
A bit of cheese pared fine,
Even a barley loaf the swallow deigns to
take. [Pause; clatter.]

What !—are we to go away
Empty-handed?—nothing ! nothing, do
you say?—
If you will give, well and good :
If you will not, we shall see ;
Make our little sticks of wood
Clatter, batter merrily ;
Walk away with your front door,
Pull down the lintel—or, what 's more,
The little woman who sits inside,
Carry her off on a pig-back ride !

[Pause; clatter.]

If you proffer to the swallow,
May to you great profit follow.
Open the door to the swallow, then ;
Open, open !
We are children, not old men.

[The door is opened, discovering LAMBE, broom in hand.]



PERSEPHONE



IAMBE

[*Flourishing her broom*]

Your little woman can hold the door,
Drive away pigs and clear the floor,—

[*The throng laugh, vociferate, and clatter loudly.*]

Pare your cheeses and eat 'em too ;
Swallow a dozen such mites as you.

[*Very loud clatter; then a pause.*]

LEADER

But, little lady, we say the spring is here.
Give of your store to celebrate the hour.

IAMBE

Then will you go away and give us peace ?

LEADER

To other wealthy homes the swallow leads us.

[*Enter METANEIRA behind IAMBE.*]

METANEIRA

The season brings us noisy little birds.



PERSEPHONE



LEADER

Young birds cry to be fed, ere they can fly.

[*They vociferate and clatter. METANEIRA turns and signs to IAMBE, who goes into the house.*]

METANEIRA

So we must needs find food to stop their mouths.

LEADER

Then will the swallow bring you happy hours.

METANEIRA

'T is a *quiet* hour we crave.

LEADER

Will you sleep still !

METANEIRA

The councillors come—

LEADER

The heads of families?

Then will we stay, and with our little mime

Win their good-will.

[*Re-enter IAMBE with a basket. She distributes cakes among the children, who receive the dole with shouts,*



PERSEPHONE



but without clatter.—Enter from the house EUMOLPUS, looking unfavorably upon the throng as they eat. Directly after EUMOLPUS, and while he is speaking, the COUNCILLORS enter from without, one by one. They take their seats in the vestibule as formerly, viewing curiously the scene.]

EUMOLPUS

What means this flummery when the Council's
call'd?

METANEIRA

It is their threat to entertain the Council.

LEADER

The swallow hath a mimic show, to add
Grace to their wisdom.

EUMOLPUS

'T is an errant bird ;
Slow coming, swift departing. She is due
Elsewhere ; our exigence can spare her mimes.

FIRST COUNCILLOR

My lord, though times be exigent, the day
Will hold more than we owe it. Shall we listen?



PERSEPHONE



METANEIRA

O, let them play, Eumolpus ; children know
Somewhat that wise heads need to ponder.—See !
[At a sign from the LEADER the children quickly draw back and dispose themselves sitting or reclining upon the ground in a half-circle facing the house, excepting the largest girl, who remains standing. At the same moment CALLITHOË and DEMO enter from the house and join the onlookers. A number of servants also enter. The girl climbs into a large wine-jar, only her head and arms emerging. The boy slings a wallet over his shoulder and takes a staff in hand. The two child actors manifest the feelings indicated by the words recited, naively, especially the girl, whose part is wholly pantomime.]

LEADER

I 'm the wanderer ; that jar 's her house ; she peeps
Forth from the window ; nobody can see,
Nobody hears us.

IAMBÉ
Nobody will tell.

LEADER

She does n't want me to go away ; she thinks
I 'll never come back.



PERSEPHONE



SECOND COUNCILLOR

And when *do* you come back?

LEADER

I come back with the *swallow*.

CALLITHOË AND DEMO

O !

LEADER

[*Approaching*]

To-day I must say good-bye,
Shall be far to-morrow.

O you treasure of my eye,
Parting, it brings sorrow !

Just because I 've loved so well,
Loved you more than tongue can tell,
Now I leave and lose you.

SECOND COUNCILLOR

Bless my soul ! but the lad is posted.

THIRD COUNCILLOR

Methinks they *are* a trifle young for this.

[*While the following lines are recited, DEMETER, still in disguise, enters from the house and stands viewing the scene contemplatively.*]



PERSEPHONE



LEADER

Two good friends and nothing more,
Who know one another ;
Sun and moon shall fly, before
These part from each other.
How much keener is the smart
When a fond true-lover's heart
In the wide world wanders !

CALLITHOË

O ! why does n't he stay at home?

METANEIRA

Hush ! hush,
Callithoë ; they 're only playing.

LEADER

Little breeze on cheeks or hands,
Airy kisses lending ;
Think 't is sighs from far-off lands
That to you I 'm sending.
Thousand every day I breathe,
There about your house to wreath,
Thinking of you ever.—

METANEIRA

Why !— she has fallen into the jar.



PERSEPHONE



IAMBE

That's only a matter of size.

FIRST COUNCILLOR

The play is well enough ; but, my lord, I note
A strange complexion of the sky.

[*The scene has suddenly grown dark and livid.*]

EUMOLPUS

"T is true ;

A thunder-cloud not far ; unusual surely
At the matin hour.—But 't is a season, such
As shall be long remember'd. Failure and famine
Are from all neighboring lands reported, though
Serenely for ourselves the winter sped.

SECOND COUNCILLOR

But mark, sire ; mark ! There falls the rain ;
Not distant, but strikes here not quite. And now
A sunbeam pierces.

METANEIRA

[*Pointing toward the side opposite DEMETER*]

See ! O see : the rainbow !

Close by !



PERSEPHONE



[*The scene, while still sombre, becomes suffused with iridescent lights, and under an arch of radiance the figure of IRIS is discovered, faintly outlined. The sitters shrink as if awe-struck, all the more when the name of DEMETER is pronounced; but DEMETER herself brightens and her standing form seems statelier than before.]*

IRIS

Demeter, Demeter, what holds thee so long,
When the word of the Father has mended thy
wrong?

Persephone risen crowns mourning with
peace ;
Thy sorrows are ended, thy wanderings
cease.

Now the threshold of Heaven thy footfall
awaits ;

Earth can spare thee what hour that fond
meeting belates.

Every bourgeon betokens thy daughter's
return,

Every bird speeding home from his mateless
sojourn.



PERSEPHONE



The wing and the blossom must falter and fade ;

These lives do but wander from waking to shade.

Twice lustrous the gems in Persephone's crown :

Both the quick and the dead heed her smile and her frown.

Her bounty and thine still with fervor besought,

Though the left hand undo what the right hand has wrought.

At the parting, Demeter, rave not, nor repine ;
The Father hath said it, All vengeance is mine.

His bow spans the welkin to cheer and to save ;

One arm by the cradle, one arm by the grave.

Each storm-cloud rolls by through the archway of time,

When swift *Iris* beams forth with her tidings sublime.



PERSEPHONE



[*The figure of IRIS fades and vanishes. The radiance shifts to the opposite side of the scene; and as the people turn they behold DEMETER, divested of her disguise, now standing forth in all the splendor of divine presence.*]

DEMETER

I am Demeter, the Mother, whom unawares
Thou and thy household entertaining, earn'd
Reward, Eumolpus, of these scatheless fields,
And for thyself and for thy peers a fame
Through all the ages round *Eleusis* flung.
A mystic union of two worlds shall link
Your living visions to the invisible dead,
The soul departed to the yearning soul;
And by hopes newly dawning reconcile
Men's aspirations to their mortal term.
Such veil'd design to further through my pain,
Persephone, the Life-child now, and now
The Bride of Death, wears her ambiguous crown.

And not thine own name only shall resound
When the *Eumolpidae* proclaim the ban
Of silence in my rites; but thrice revered,
As at Demeter's bosom thrice inspired,



PERSEPHONE



Triptolemus, from this my central shrine,
Sowing the seeds of knowledge shall go forth
A peaceful conqueror to earth's farthest bound.
That golden era swiftly fled, through him
O'er taken not yet, shall glimmer and beckon still ;
In the pursuit, than while possess'd, more dear.

But rise ; arise, ye people !—for this day
Of revelation and renascence brooks
No waiting its behest to consecrate—
Arise, men, women, children ; and lay hand,
With heavenly vigor for the task endued,
To the founding of my temple. Forth ! forth !—
There,

Where to the wave yon solid earth declines,
Demeter and Cora shall abide. Each stone
Planted this hour its solemn portion guards
Of mystery to the eternal ages seal'd.

*[Obeying the word and gesture of DEMETER they rise
and go out silently, but with brisk and decisive steps.
As the last person passes the scene grows dim and the
form of the goddess fades as in a cloud.]*

Ολβιος δστις ἵδων ἐκεῖνα
εἰσιν ὑπὸ χρόνα . οἶδεν μὲν βίου τελευτάν,
οἶδεν δὲ διόσδοτον ἀρχάν.

PINDAR.

———δωρεὰς διττάς,
αἴπερ μέγισται τυγχάνουσιν οὖσαι,
τούς τε καρπούς,
οἱ τοῦ μὴ θηριώδῶς ζῆν ἡμᾶς αἴτιοι γεγόνασι,
καὶ τὴν τελετήν,
ἥς οἱ μετασχόντες περί τε τῆς τοῦ βίου τελευτῆς
καὶ τοῦ σύμπαντος αἰῶνος ἡδίους τὰς ἐλπίδας
ἔχουσιν.

ISOCRATES.



PERSEPHONE



EPILOGUE

In the Temple at Eleusis

The scene opened discloses the interior of the narrow *prodomus* or Entrance Hall of the temple of Demeter and Cora. The wide central entrance to the sanctuary behind is closed with light curtains. By the dim torchlight the inner frieze of the *prodomus* with its sculptured designs is indistinctly seen. In front of the curtained passage stands the Herald of the Mysteries, crowned with myrtle and holding a lighted torch.

It is night. Strains of music are heard in the distance without, mingled with jubilant outcries as of a moving throng. They seem to draw nearer, until presently the processional chant is distinctly heard.

VOICES WITHOUT

Iacch', O Iacche !

[*Nearer and louder*]

Iacch', O Iacche ! Iacch', O Iacche !

Iacchus, comrade of the rout,
Come to song and merry shout !
Where thy holy mystics rave
And the myrtle-chaplet wave ;



PERSEPHONE



Where the brandish'd torch-flame leaps,
Across the pitchy shadows sweeps,
Come, and lead the merry throng
All the sacred way along.
Wake the many-echo'd cry
Where with young the aged vie :
Iacch', O Iacche !
Iacch', O Iacche !

HERALD

Many mind the call ; but few,
Chosen, proved, and purified,
May the hallow'd emblems view
Which Demeter's portals hide.

VOICES WITHOUT

Iacchus, to thy nightly choir
Guiding star and beacon-fire,
Light my anxious footsteps now
Toward the temple's fluted brow,
Dark with secrets guarded well
In their shroud of asphodel.



EPILOGUE

HERALD

Many cry ; but they alone
 Tried and taught to watch and wait
Can the exaltation own
 From the Lesser to the Great.

The Candidates (*epoptae*) enter silently in solemn order, arrayed in white robes and wearing their myrtle wreaths, the men on one side of the hall, the women on the other. They stand facing sidewise toward the curtained passage.

HERALD

Though ye enter or depart,
 Though ye look not or behold,
Bars of oak be on your heart,
 On your lips the key of gold.

CHOIR

(*of Mystics within the sanctuary*)

Of his life the spring and source,
Of its troublous stream the course,
 The mysterious chain
Threading its vicissitude
He marks not, who hath not view'd
 In the Mother's fane



PERSEPHONE



The weird symbols of her woe ;
Nor can he the solace know
 Which new hopes inspire,
When the Child her faith redeems,
Rising through the gates of dreams,
A divine fulfilment seems
 Of the soul's desire.

HERALD

They, whose conscious hymns redound
 To the reverence of their name,
With a sense of peace profound
 Your beatitude proclaim.

The curtains are drawn apart, revealing the inner sanctuary, with the HIEROPHANT standing at one side. The *Choir of Mystics*, who continue to chant their hymns from time to time, remain unseen from first to last.—Music of stringed instruments is heard during the intervals. The HIEROPHANT at first points with his staff in silence toward the centre of the sanctuary at the objects there displayed, brilliantly lighted from above : a miniature threshing-floor of circular form ; upon it a very ancient wooden image of Demeter, a plow of primitive pattern, a sickle, and a winnowing-fan.



EPILOGUE



HIEROPHANT

How, through tardy ages run,
By unnumber'd labors won,
Have these simple and sublime
Emblems of defeated time,
With their mystical accord
Of an infinite reward,
Come condignly to appear
On *your* sober'd vision clear !

Once, each instrument and art
Found no sign nor counterpart.
All unneeded and unknown,
Not yet to such usance grown
Childlike man no warning word
Of their birth and burthen heard.
His repast the oak-tree spread,
From its wind-stript branches shed ;
And the wild grape and the bee
Soothed that foolish infancy.
Reck'd they light the past, nor more
What the future held in store.



PERSEPHONE

Slender portion, but for *death*,
Life of worth or meaning hath.
Unbenign the sun on those
Thoughtless generations rose,
Nor his setting spell'd for them
Threnody and requiem.
Passionless, untaught to mourn,
Marching blindly toward the bourn,
Swift they sprang and grew and pass'd ;
And the earliest and the last,
As some hovering vapor-tress
Seized and whirl'd to nothingness,
Nor remember'd nor forgot
Faded, vanish'd, and was not.

For a careless world what sign
Of an Earth-mother divine?
What probation or reprieve
Could their silly thoughts conceive?
Nature's increase, cull'd from chance,
Won no gift or cognizance.
'T was for them enough to mark
Lapse of daylight unto dark ;
And the blended seasons ran
Into one, for stolid man.



EPILOGUE

Aloof, and with her Heaven-born child,
By earth's farthest border wild,
Where Selene's crescent beam
Glimpses close her partner's stream
And zephyrian airs inspire
Father Ocean's virgin choir,
Blithely roved the Mother then.—
Unbesought of thankless men,
Could her soul forebode the scene
That untenanted demesne
Should for their redemption show
Through her own unfathom'd woe !

[*The curtains remain open, but the scene becomes totally dark, and the Eoptae are heard to move inward at the two sides as the HERALD speaks.*]

HERALD

Long ye waited, nor in vain,
The all-envied, blissful state
Of *Beholders* to attain,
By the view initiate.

Once more illuminated the scene discloses the EOPTÆ seated as in a small theatre, behind and facing the threshing-floor, which forms as it were its *orchestra*. The HIEROPHANT and the HERALD are not in view. The area presents now, in place of the former emblems, a motionless tableau :



PERSEPHONE



the Mother relinquishing the Daughter to the custody of Death, who, as priest of the dead, seems in the act of severing with sacrificial knife a lock of hair from the child's head. At one side the action thus represented is itself symbolized by a tall lily growing in a jar.—While the figures remain motionless, the flower is seen suddenly to droop, bend, and hang down with wilted stalk and petals.

CHOIR

Each blessing hath its price,
Its proper sacrifice,
 To nature due.
Whoso receiveth breath
Oweth the same to death,
 To aspire anew.

EPOPTÆ

[*Rising, as they chant the refrain*]

{ Whoso receiveth breath
Oweth the same to death,
 To aspire anew.

CHOIR

They to completeness grown
Dread not to yield their own
 In fated turn ;



EPILOGUE



But, when the scion's flower
Falleth before its hour,
By grief they learn.

EPOPTÆ

{ But, when the scion's flower
Falleth before its hour,
By grief we learn.

CHOIR

Death comes to set thee free ;
O, greet him cheerily
As thy true friend.
Then, all thy fears shall cease,
And in eternal peace
Thy penance end.

EPOPTÆ

{ Then, all my fears shall cease,
And in eternal peace
My penance end.

[*The light is again extinguished and the voice of the HERALD is heard in the darkness.]*



PERSEPHONE



HERALD

That which seems the end, ye saw
As beginning first unfold ;
Now its lesson and its law
By the second phase behold.

The light re-admitted shows the *Epoptae* in their seats as before, contemplating the Second Tableau : the Mother sunk in grief by the Fount of Callichorus, while the two daughters of Eumolpus stand by in an attitude of consolation and encouragement.—The jar which held the flower is in plain view.

CHOIR

Joy and sorrow in one chalice blended,
Their commingling is the common lot,
From the birth-hour till the struggle 's ended,
From the palace to the shepherd's cot.

Long the Mother's heaven roll'd bright above
her,
Now funereal shadows shroud the scene.
Shall at last the soul's new breath uncover
Deepening realms of azure sky serene?



EPILOGUE



EPOPTÆ

{ Shall at last the soul's new breath uncover
{ Deepening realms of azure sky serene?

CHOIR

Lo ! no more on slender stem the lily
Lifts her smile of frail beatitude.

'T is the bulb, low lying, dark and stilly,
With invisible potency endued.

They of order'd life and mood unshifting,
Whom the black earth seemeth to bewray,
Powers unseen bestow *their* heart's uplifting,
Not the beckoning phantoms of a day.

EPOPTÆ

{ Powers unseen bestow our heart's uplifting,
{ Not the beckoning phantoms of a day.

[*Again the scene becomes dark.*]

HERALD

Oft with head in mourning bow'd
Those despondent hours ye knew ;
What lay hid beneath the shroud
'T is the triple turn to view.



PERSEPHONE



The light restored shows the *Epoptæ* contemplating the Third Tableau. Hermes, attended by the Hours, leads the Daughter to the Mother from the Underworld.—Immediately, from the jar a lily-stem is seen slowly and steadily to rise, until it expands again into the perfect flower.

CHOIR

To confirming graces
Springs the soul renew'd,
Not to troublous phases
Of incertitude.
Now such radiance it beholds
As the flower her fringe unfolds,
Rare and rainbow-hued.

EPOPTÆ

{ Now such radiance it beholds
As the flower her fringe unfolds,
Rare and rainbow-hued.

CHOIR

Who their thoughts unprison
From inane desire,
Finer-temper'd risen
Out of chastening fire,



EPILOGUE

They hark not to fickle time,
But to harmonies sublime
Of the eternal choir.

EPOPTÆ

{ We hark not to fickle time,
But to harmonies sublime
Of the eternal choir.

[*The scene becomes dark.*]

HERALD

Think ye 't was all, when she, whose spell,
Through the half-year lost above,
On the unseen dwellers fell,
Rose again, her sway to prove?

The scene is again illuminated, and while the *Epoptæ* still occupy their seats, emblems other than at first are seen upon the area. A sheaf of wheat and the winnowing-fan are enwreathed with a luxuriant grape-vine laden with ripe clusters.—The HIEROPHANT re-enters.



PERSEPHONE



HIEROPHANT

In what plow and sickle earn'd
Saving lore the wise discern'd.
Bread, of bearded grain a part,
Furnish'd forth by fire's new art—
Not alone the body's food,
For reflection's worth it stood.
Gentler views to them were lent
As o'er the upturn'd glebe they bent,
Watching then through reckon'd term
For the green uplifted germ ;
From the kernel, scatter'd wide,
To the bristling country-side ;
Area in circle worn,
And bullocks treading out the corn.
Even so, their fate to solve,
Did the thoughts of men revolve.

Of all wisdoms, most profound
Was the seed with harvest crown'd ;
Which Triptolemus renew'd,
By Demeter thrice imbued,
From Eleusis' wave-lapt glade,
Round the waiting world convey'd.



EPILOGUE



But in mind a region lies
That pertains not to the wise,
And of mystery a side
To reflective thought denied.
How should discipline sedate
Avail that sphere to penetrate
Which cold reason probes in vain,
Nor can subtle wit explain?—
To the unbound *soul* alone
In ecstatic vision shown.

On this holy temple's place
But a pedestal and base
Could men's aspirations frame
Ere the boy *Iacchus* came.

CHOIR
Iacch', O Iacche !

HIEROPHANT
Every human effort fine
His transfiguration divine ;
For a crown and coping cast,
The supremest and the last.



PERSEPHONE



On your hearts what trammels lay
'T was Iacchus tore away,
Clove the mist that veil'd your eyes,
Bade the struggling spirit rise ;

CHOIR

Iacch', O Iacche !

EPOPTÆ

[*Not in unison, but in agitated manner*]

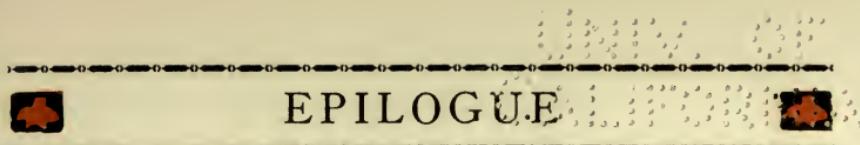
Iacch', O Iacche !—Iacch', O Iacche !

The HIEROPHANT during this interruption points with his staff toward the area, which with its emblems suddenly sinks down and disappears. The *Epoptae* direct their gaze with rapt attention upon the chasm thus opened, while the speaker continues.—The music is now of flutes.

HIEROPHANT

Lifts his starry torch beyond
The black vapors of despond,
Where looks down a kindlier sky
And the fields Elysian lie.

[100]



EPILOGUE

'T is Iacchus wakes a vision than Castalian dews
more clear,
And of them whose bosoms hold him maketh every
man a seer.

CHOIR

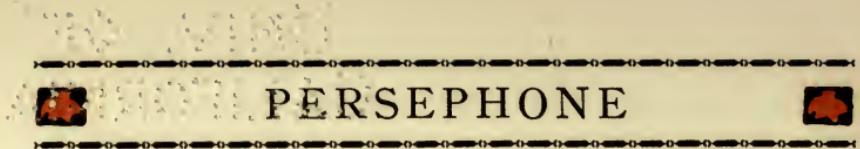
Maketh every man to see the haven of his mortal
quest,
With ambrosial winds careening past the Islands
of the Blest ;
And the spheres, smooth-rolling, breathe their
harmonies divine and deep,
When his sleep becomes his waking and his waking
is his sleep.

EPOPTÆ

{ And the spheres, smooth-rolling, breathe their
harmonies divine and deep,
When my sleep becomes my waking and my
waking is my sleep.

HIEROPHANT

So the sage, awaking, welcomed the pronounce-
ment of his doom ;
On the scenes his mind prefigured fell no shadow
from the tomb.



PERSEPHONE

CHOIR

On his vales of contemplation no disturbing image
fell,
More reposeful and serener than the Mead of
Asphodel.
And he left for them to ponder who these mysteries
deny,
Whether dying be not living and to live be not to
die.

EPOPTÆ

{ And we leave for them to ponder who these
mysteries deny,
Whether dying be not living and to live be not
to die.

HIEROPHANT

Then, as the dragon-fly
Will to a newer sky
His filmy wings unfold
Of amethyst and gold,
Let *your* freed souls aspire,
Tuned to the mystic choir,
To hearken and to view
What they nor heard nor knew,



EPILOGUE



Who on this disc of earth
Found a too early birth ;
Ere yet Demeter's woe
One world the living know
Did to the other wed
Of the reputed dead.

CHOIR

Happy the man who once these sights hath seen,
Ere to a hidden realm the call he hears :
He knows life's end, he knows its origin ;
He knows the meshwork of his mortal years.

What though in spirit destined to endure,
Or to new incarnation rise again?
Except the recompense were large and sure,
Not even *this* bourn might his frail steps attain.

So far, so far, tried virtue turns the scale.—
Now, o'er the vista thus to you reveal'd
The Queen of Mystery draws her solemn veil ;
Your bosom's gates are barr'd, your lips are
seal'd.



PERSEPHONE

EPOPTÆ

I could not say what I behold,
'T is not for human tongue ;
No mortal hath its secret told,
No earthly minstrel sung.

CHOIR

The lily now, and now the rose
Alternate bloom and fade :
Now on *her* cheek the day-beam glows,
Now sinks to vesper shade.

EPOPTÆ

O, 't is no evening of the soul
Upon these eyes descends ;
A matin song no griefs control
Its waking vision lends.



EPILOGUE



CHOIR

The Mother lives, the Daughter dies ;
'T is as the leaves do fall.
Her spouse, no regent of the skies,
Black-brow'd, funereal.

EPOPTÆ

His frown, the ebon crown he wears
No terrors hold for me,
So long that sovereignty he shares
With pale Persephone.

THE END

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